

What is green cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting?



The word *green* is often used to market products and services. There are no government definitions of the word green. There are no laws for how the word can be used. This makes it hard for the consumer to decide on the best product.

When we use the phrase green cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting, we mean:

1 Using cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting products with less risk of harm to human health, especially the health of children, or the environment.

- One way to find lower risk products is to use those that have been certified by a third party group such as:
 - ◇ Green Seal
 - ◇ EcoLogo
 - ◇ US EPA's Safer Choice

These organizations look at effects on human health, wildlife, and the environment when they test products. These organizations have websites where you can find lists of lower risk products (see the Resources on the reverse side).

- No products used to clean, sanitize, or disinfect are completely safe. In the child care setting, use lower risk products and always follow the instructions on the product label.
- Remember that when you see words like green, all natural, organic, ecofriendly, and environmentally friendly on a cleaning product label, they have no legal meaning.

- Manufacturers of cleaning products don't have to test their products to make sure they are safe for people and the environment. They don't have to list the ingredients they use on the label of a product so it can be hard to find lower risk cleaning products.

2 Using sanitizers and disinfectants only when and where necessary. Unlike cleaners, these products contain chemicals that *kill* germs. They are all hazardous to people and the environment to some degree.

- The only group that tests sanitizers and disinfectants to find those that are lower risk is the EPA's Design for the Environment Antimicrobial Pesticide Pilot Project.
- Some products with the active ingredients citric acid, accelerated hydrogen peroxide, and lactic acid have been found to be lower risk.
- Always clean the surface, then disinfect. Allow a disinfectant to remain visibly wet for the amount of "contact" time stated on the label. This is how long it takes to kill germs with the product. If you don't keep the surface visibly wet for the entire contact time, you could be breeding superbugs that are resistant to sanitizer and disinfectants.
- Remember, sanitizing and disinfecting are temporary. As soon as someone touches a disinfected surface, germs start to grow again.
- Cleaning vigorously with an all-purpose cleaner and a microfiber cloth can remove most germs on a surface and poses less risk of harm for people and the environment. Be sure to check if state or local regulations require the use of disinfectants.

3 Changing behavior to reduce the spread of infectious disease

No chemicals are needed! We can reduce the risk of getting an infectious disease by:

- **Hand washing.** It is the most important way to reduce the spread of infectious disease. It also reduces exposure to toxic chemicals that collect in dust and get on our hands and into our mouths, especially for young children.
- **Getting vaccinated!** Vaccinations are the only way to prevent many diseases that are spread in the air. Vaccinations also protect other people, especially those who are vulnerable such as infants who aren't old enough to be vaccinated and elderly people, and people getting chemotherapy, who don't have good immune systems.
- **Sneezing into your sleeve.** This keeps germs trapped in fabric where they don't live very long and are less likely to be passed on to other people.
- **Keeping 3 to 6 feet away from others when you sneeze or cough.**
- **Not touching the inside of your mouth, nose, and eyes.** The skin that lines these parts of your body is called a mucous membrane. When you touch your mucous membranes with germey hands, the germs can get into your body and make you sick.
- **Staying home when you are sick.**



RESOURCES

EcoLogo www.ecologo.org/en/

US EPA Design for the Environment (for antimicrobials)
www.epa.gov/pesticides/regulating/labels/design-dfe-pilot.html

US EPA Safer Choice (for cleaners)
www2.epa.gov/saferchoice

Green Seal www.greenseal.org/

Dahl, R. "Greenwashing: Do you know what you are buying?" *Environ Health Perspectives*, 2010 June; 118(6): A246–A252. Available online at: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2898878/pdf/ehp-118-a246.pdf